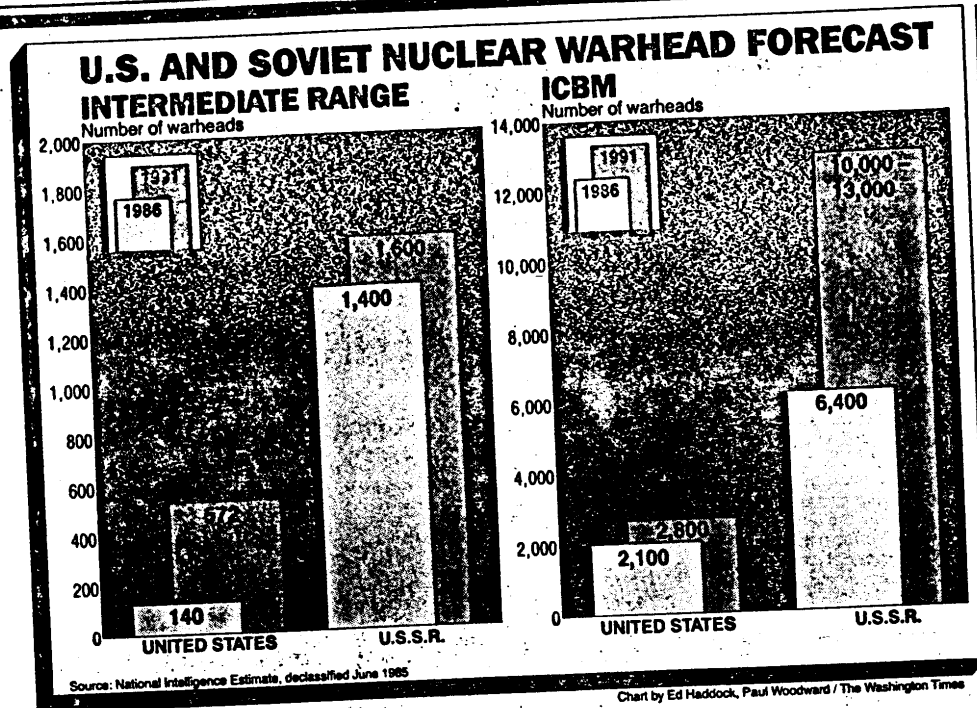


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Sen. McClure sees Soviets widening '6-1' missile lead

By Bill Gertz
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The U.S.-Soviet nuclear weapons gap will continue to widen over the next five years because of expected cuts in U.S. defense spending and continued growth of Soviet arsenals, says conservative Sen. James McClure.

The Idaho Republican, a member of the defense appropriations subcommittee and chairman of the energy subcommittee responsible for overseeing the U.S. nuclear warhead program, made two Pentagon charts available in a "Dear Colleague" letter to members of Congress last week.

The letter was circulated before the debate on the fiscal 1987 defense budget scheduled to begin on Capitol Hill this week. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger is scheduled to deliver the Pentagon's annual military posture statement Wednesday, according to a Pentagon spokesman.

The Pentagon budget request is expected to total between \$282 billion and \$300 billion.

The charts compare U.S. and Soviet intercontinental and intermediate-range warhead numbers and show that the number of Soviet ICBM warheads will grow from the current estimated 6,400 to between 10,000 and 13,000 in 1991, according to a government defense expert.

The number of Soviet intermediate-range nuclear warheads is expected to grow from some 1,400 warheads on the SS-20 missile to a 1991 level of 1,600.

By contrast, U.S. Pershing II and cruise missile warheads will grow from the current arsenal of 140 to a projected 572, according to the defense expert.

Mr. McClure described the comparison of the intermediate-range missiles as "somewhat unrealistic" because Pershings and cruise missiles have one-third less range and

their warheads have one-thirtieth the explosive power of the SS-20.

An aide to Sen. McClure said the charts were declassified from the National Intelligence Council's 1985 assessment of Soviet strategic weapons capabilities.

"In two key measures of comparative U.S.-Soviet military power, the trends show that the gaps of 6-1 and 7-1 currently favoring the Soviets will continue to widen against the United States," the senator wrote.

The senator believes the latest estimates are conservative and the missile gap could be wider.

"The historical tendency of U.S. intelligence to underestimate Soviet strategic forces, active Soviet efforts to blind and deceive U.S. intelligence and especially the robust Soviet ICBM and IRBM mobile missile deployment programs now under way indicate that the current gaps between Soviet forces and U.S. forces will continue to grow," Mr. McClure stated.